

[Boys]

LIVELIHOOD IN SILWA

FROM SIXTEEN ONWARDS

[GIRLS]

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Beginning of responsibility with use of implements, e.g. plough, jarrafa, hoe, etc. . . .

All kinds of previously mentioned domestic work.

Complete seclusion, whether married or not.

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Responsibility in sowing, thinning out plants, and fertilizer distribution.

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Making 'maktafs', mats, panniers by plaiting palm leaves and sewing the plaits in the required shape.

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A concrete example of a sixteen-year-old boy's day of work, who has no brothers, is given in the following account:

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'I am overworked, because there are no other "hands" to help me and my father in working on our land. I spend practically no time at home during the day as I am busy now fetching the fertilizer and have to rise at the crack of dawn, when the "muazzin" calls "Prayers are better than sleep". My mother packs bread and dates, and sometimes eggs, in a handkerchief for my breakfast on the way to the hills. I am then ready with my camel, either to call on my neighbours or to be called on by them for the "fajriah" - the dawn load. On our way to the hills we partake of our breakfast and sing songs on camelback. On our arrival at a good spot we make our camels kneel, and load the panniers, filling the "maktaf" with clay first, lifting it on the knee and emptying it into the panniers. The test for a good "marrag" is to be able to do the lifting and emptying in a steady way, maintaining a balance in the loads. Then we make our camels rise, and, following them, we go on to the fields. After the first load, we go back for a reload called "dihawiah"—the full beginning of the day (about ten o'clock). Meanwhile, my father prepares grass for the camel, or engages in irrigating the land. After the second load, I take my midday meal at home, and go for a third load of fertilizer, called "asriah" (about three o'clock in the afternoon). If I don't go for the afternoon load, I help my father in distributing fertilizer for some time, then I would take the camel home, laden with grass, at sunset, whereas my father follows me later with the cow.

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'Of course my work becomes easier when the fertilizer-fetching season finishes. I then can enjoy my tea in the morning, go to the field at broad daybreak, and attend to the feeding of the cow and the camel, or irrigate the land. In the evenings I am not too tired to have a chat with my friends after the evening meal, or to pay visits to my relatives.'

It is quite obvious from the preceding discussion that the welfare of the family depends largely on the labour potential it has at its disposal, and the harmonious distribution of that labour. One of the main features in the economic activities in the village is that immediately the younger child develops to the stage where he can take over the tasks carried on by an

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMUNITY

834 tions, and an old woman can pass by a group of men without covering her face, and can salute them, or talk to them on passing, but even then she cannot sit with men outside the house.

INTER-FAMILY RELATIONS

593 It is appropriate here to discuss the stylized norms of relationship and behaviour that should obtain between the various members of the family as an index to the understanding of the social structure and its functioning.

The husband-wife pattern is one where the husband is the superior partner and enjoys the highest position in the family. He is, as the saying goes, 'the supporting pillar and the vantage of the house', who is expected to make all the important decisions. The wife should tell her husband of the major events in the household, though he should not by convention betray any eagerness in enquiring about them. The husband is socially responsible for the acts and undertakings of his wife, immediately she moves from her matrilocal residence. He usually plans the work of his sons, while the wife does the same with the daughters; but he is not expected to interfere with his wife's domestic work. On the other hand, the wife is supposed to be submissive, devoted, and respectful to her husband. Sexual fidelity is the hallmark of sustained marriage relationship, as infidelity entails at least divorce, if not attempting to kill the wife and the paramour. As a wife, she should also attend to her husband, offering the best food to him rather than to the children or herself; the reason being that she can always have children but she cannot afford to have a substitute for her supporter (sanad). She should open the door for her husband when he knocks, pour out the water when he washes his hands after the meal, and give him priority in every respect.

Although the wife seems subordinate in this pattern of relationship, she is almost the absolute manager of the house. She is the treasurer of the crops, money, legal documents, and the holder of the keys to the various chests in the house. If the man is expected to be generous and showy, the wife is expected to be frugal and industrious. The saying is that 'the man is like an overflowing sea, while the woman is like a dyke, checking his undue extravagance'. It is also conceded that the building up of a man is due to his wife, but so is his downfall, which would be regarded as the result of his wife's domestic policy.

In spite of the fact that married women do not work in the field in Silwa and in most parts of Aswan Province, the wife certainly monopolizes certain economic pursuits which are considered to be purely her domain. She raises chickens, geese, ducks, goats and sheep, and men recognize this as a purely female occupation. This is in contrast to the raising of cows, camels and donkeys by men. My informant, Mahmoud, told me: 'Women look after the "small change" while men look after the pounds.' The wife raises poultry and tends to small change as these are directly concerned

ADOLESCENCE, SEX AND MARRIAGE

155 guilt, especially with regard to sex, produce the psychological disposition
152 to sexual jealousy institutionalized in this community as well as in many
[694] other communities in rural Egypt? It is well known that in Egypt disputes
over land, water and women rank as three of the most common causes
of crime.¹ This does not mean that sibling rivalry and sex prohibitions
are the only causes, but seem to provide the psychological field for the
moral and religious values connected with fidelity and the propriety of
sexual jealousy. A woman is identified not only with 'shame' but also
with 'honour' and to preserve one's honour is tantamount to avoid ex-
posure to shame.²

[80] These attitudes, according to Kardiner, would also help to understand
the dichotomy of sexes and to prevent sexual jealousies from coming out
to open hostilities. They also appear to be one of the weapons of social
equilibrium and of preserving in-male and in-female solidarity.³

599 Here it is also possible to give some satisfactory answer to the connec-
tion between the nature of the community and its demands on individuals
as represented by sexual regulations. The central and principal quality
in a polite (muaddab) or virtuous person is his conformity to the norms
governing sexual behaviour; the flouting of which in any manner would
condemn him as impolite and vicious irrespective of his other qualities.
Morality and virtue are primarily connected with stringent sexual con-
trols. The villagers, although envying the city dwellers their material
comfort, deplore their moral laxity, e.g. women's emancipation in dress,
love affairs, use of cosmetics, women's participation in men's work. In this
community I heard of no cases of adultery or illegitimate children for the
last thirty years, though cases of homosexuality and jokes about sexual
pleasure from animals are not uncommon amongst the adolescents and
young men. Stringent sexual controls are an essential agent for the main-
tenance of solidarity, the cohesion and the orderly living of a group with
its puritanic religious code and its social organization based, among other
things, on a clear-cut sex dichotomy.⁴

884 Whatever views may be held about the psychological problems con-
885 nected with adolescence in Silwa, this stage is certainly the prologue to
the full status of adulthood which is eventually attained by marriage.
Marriage, after circumcision, marks the greatest ceremonial occasion in
the individual's life. The best way of describing marriage conditions in
585 Silwa is to give an account of a marriage ceremony which the writer

¹ Doreen Warriner, *Land and Poverty in the Middle East*, London, 1948.

² Cf. J. C. Flugel, *Men and their Motives*, London, 1943, and Ernest Jones, *Papers on Psycho-analysis*, where he writes: "The ultimate source of the fear and guilt that lie behind all these reactions (of sexual jealousy) is the relationship to another potential man and it is derived from the boy's unconscious fixation on childish attitudes; it is hard for him to "picture" a woman quite apart from another man to whom she secretly belongs." p. 483.

³ A. Kardiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 476-7.

⁴ See Margaret Read, 'The Moral Code of the Ngoni and their former Military State', in *Africa*, Vol. XI, 1938.

THE FELLÄHIN OF UPPER EGYPT

764 mentioned palm-branches, which are often carried in the funeral
 777 processions, are placed over the graves (see Fig. 53) because they
 775 are believed to bring a blessing to the dead. For the same reason
 plants of *šabr* (aloes) are often planted, either in earthenware pots
 or in the ground itself, close to the mound.

764 Sometimes these rock-hewn burial-places are of a more elaborate
 design. Instead of the pit giving direct access to the burial-
 chamber there may be an intervening passage, the outer end of
 which, not the immediate entrance to the chamber, is bricked up
 before the pit is filled with sand and the excavated *débris*.

If the cemetery does not lie in the lower desert, but in, or on the
 edge of, the cultivation, the graves are somewhat differently con-
 structed. A large chamber is excavated underground and sur-
 mounted by a flat-topped or vaulted superstructure, which varies
 considerably according to the taste or wealth of the owner of the
 tomb. The chamber constitutes a family vault, and most of the
 members of one family are buried in it, the sexes being usually
 divided, the men lying together apart from the women. This is
 the general rule, but I have been told that it is not always strictly
 adhered to by the *fellähin*. Above the ground, at one end of the
 superstructure, is a recess, which indicates where the opening to
 the grave is situated underground. Palm-branches are placed in
 front of this recess, and plants of *šabr* are often planted on either
 769 side of it. At this spot, too, the relatives and friends assemble and
 sit down during the periodical visits to the graves discussed on
 pp. 117 ff. and 263 ff.

775 That the dead should appear to their relations and fellow-
 villagers soon after death is looked upon as a matter of course
 and an event of common occurrence. I have heard of many such
 appearances, which are much welcomed by, and are a great comfort
 to, the mourners. The following account of an after-death ap-
 pearance which led to the detection of crime was given me by an
 old friend, who swore that it was quite true.

837 Two years before the story was told to me a man in one of
 684 the provinces in Middle Egypt married a woman of questionable
 character. After the marriage he found out that she was un-
 faithful to him, so one day, accompanied by a friend, he took her
 out for a walk. She wanted to go one way, but they insisted on
 682 her going the way they chose. They went on till they arrived at
 a newly dug well, into which they threw her and then filled up the
 116 ft.

of Egypt in 1937 there were 7,947,193 men to 7,957,332 women. As nearly everyone marries, the inference is obvious. It may be, too, that Moslem customs have been counteracted to some extent by natural law and by Christian influence as represented in the Coptic family. In any case, years of work and suffering together, children, and a wife's good care create an almost unbreakable bond.

The temperament of the fellaheen, especially of the women, is very ardent and sensual. Marriage is to them less an affair of love than one of sexual attraction and reproduction.

The fellah's wife usually enjoys better health than her husband, who is weakened by bilharzia. She is younger and despite Islam has had considerable freedom in her own affairs since the most ancient times. Village tradition requires on pain of death that she should be physically a virgin when she marries, but mentally she has ceased to be so long before. Since childhood she has been aware of her parents' intercourse, which is quite open owing to lack either of privacy or of modesty. The conversation of the women, even before young girls, turns often on these subjects, not perhaps viciously, but certainly without restraint. They tell each other of the charms and stratagems with which to please and hold their menfolk.

The men, who are more reserved and by their way of life utterly materialistic, understand only sexual love. They revel in it, each with his own wife, and are kept faithful by virtue than by village law. Adultery leads immediately to bloodshed, and prostitutes are beyond their means.

The heat of passion is short-lived. At thirty a fellah woman is no longer attractive, but the children she has borne her husband bind him to her. Both want children above everything else. To the wife they mean social prestige, for barrenness is a disgrace and the chief cause of polygamy and divorce (**). To the father they represent helpers and successors, who will allow him to rest and give orders. Accordingly families are large. The average number of children is five, and this presupposes eight to ten births. The older they grow the more important does the mother become.

Another thing that binds the man to his wife is her wisdom and authority, which are often greater than his. A fellah proverb has it that 'Man is a river, woman a dyke'.

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

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UPPER EGYPT.

THE FAMILY.

- 837 Mohammed's dictum regarding wine is also true of love—it has many good sides, but also a great many and even more that are bad and dangerous. The Prophet has therefore cut Cupid's wings as well as he could; by the armour of concealment he protected the sexes from the swiftly wounding arrow of the god, and granted to his faithful believers the joys of domestic love in full, perhaps in too full, measure so soon, and to as great an extent as they could do homage to them. Matches are made early, and love's thirst is usually quenched in an orderly and legitimate manner. Fallen virgins, illegitimate children, bachelors, and old maids hardly exist in Mohammedan countries, although there are perhaps more unfaithful wives and husbands, and especially wives who have gone astray and been divorced, than elsewhere. Existing regulations render it difficult for these faithless members of both sexes to meet directly; but this is managed
- [848] by the herd of procurers and procuresses, who are comparatively numerous in the East, though held in the deepest contempt. "Women contrive to meet their gallants, even
- [538] though shut up in a box," says the Oriental himself in a very common proverb, as well as in many a tale. Adultery committed by a woman was punished with drowning down to a
- [689] short time ago; among the ancient Egyptians by cutting off the nose. But the Mussulman is proud with regard to the above-mentioned state of matters, and listens with scorn to the statistical revelations made by the states of the West, which suffer from all kinds of moral sores no less than the more dignified "sick man."
- 595 Nothing shall here be said in approval of polygamy, but to those who have had lengthened opportunities for watching its effects it does not appear as a rule so black as Western imagination is accustomed at a distance to paint it. A thorough panegyric would perhaps show that it even possesses some advantages on moral grounds; and in the West also it certainly exists in some social circles. In the East it has prevailed from the earliest times, from the Bedouin to the king,